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ABSTRACT

A review of the literature reveals that a complete model, within a political framework, for what takes place when special interest groups and mass media interact does not exist. Since media access is more successful for groups with specific goals and resources, a model for the interaction of special interest groups and the mass media focuses on those groups that use the media to participate in political discourse. The five major special interest group components are as follows: (1) the realistic or unrealistic nature of a goal and whether or not it falls within the political mainstream; (2) the level of resources available to the group; (3) the news media's perception of issue legitimacy; (4) whether or not the activity itself fits into the mainstream, and how the news media perceive the activity's legitimacy; and (5) the spokesperson's knowledge of news values and his or her legitimacy. Since groups base their media activities, in part, on the success of their interactions with the news media, they may choose to "court" the media by executing the same activity again or by attempting a new activity. Groups that cycle through the model with successful results on subsequent tries probably tend toward participation in more legitimately perceived activities. This model needs to be tested, modified, and linked with other components in order to achieve a more complete understanding of the process of interaction between special interest groups and the mass media. (SRT)

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SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS AND MASS COMMUNICATION
AS POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: A MODEL FOR INTERACTION EFFECTS

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Introduction

Models from political science perspectives rarely explicitly state the role of the mass media when discussing special interest groups, and mass media models are rarely placed directly within the context of political participation. In fact, mass communication models in general are seldom explicitly situated within sociopolitical theories and political models seldom include mass media variables except as neutral transmitters.¹

Social change is not very well explained by current political theories. One reason for this lack of theoretical power may be the paucity of mass communication variables -- the models are missing the production of signification.²

Alford and Friedland, in the most recent attempt to build toward a unified sociopolitical theory,³ define three basic paradigms that can be used to categorize most sociopolitical research: pluralism; elite perspectives, and; class analysis. Although the mass media's role is generally only implied, some basic assumptions can be determined from the paradigms. Within the pluralist perspective, the mass media are considered neutral message carriers of competing ideas in a free market place where access is guaranteed by the First Amendment and decision-making is rational. In elite theory, or the managerial perspective, many members of the mass media are also members of elite configurations and, therefore, the inevitable dominant class. Class analysis views the mass media as potentially hegemonic or as potential liberators depending upon who owns the means of production of signs.

Quite obviously, communication must be placed more centrally. Any hope for a better understanding of the broader functions of the mass media in processes of social and political change depends upon this replacement. Indeed, can social change take place in post-industrial structures without the mass media as a central component?

Mass communication research in the United States generally assumes a pluralist model, but this placement may not be accurate. In fact, pluralism as a political theory is almost exclusively the product of the United States (elsewhere, elite theory and class analyses prevail). Information that allows an audience to understand conflicts within a personal context so that action can be taken is the underlying, important guarantee of pluralism in a liberal democracy. "Information often leads to action,"⁴ and this applies to the political arena as well as to other social processes. Unlike the presumably easily attained democratic "participation" of the past, individuals today gain access to others through organizations and it is assumed that this access to others is often achieved through the mass media, "...the media are a functional substitute for concrete group contact, for the now impossible meeting of the whole."⁵ There is a definite need for the press to perform a "reflexive" function in political communication⁶ and this need for citizen interaction is, indeed, essential for a stable political system based on pluralism.⁷ Participation through the mass media in the political process can be included as a major measurable media effect in the pluralist perspective.⁸

One way to test the pluralist assumptions underlying mass

media research is to better define the mass communication process within a political framework.

The model proposed in this paper is an attempt to begin to bridge the gap between sociopolitical theory and mass communication research by examining one component of a complex process, the media/special interest group interaction.

This paper will outline the media and group variables that can lead special interest groups into the mainstream of legitimate political activities. Five components of the special interest group/news media interaction are defined: group goals; group resources; the issue or issues; the activity itself, and; group spokespersons.

The focus here is on those groups that are media dependent -- that is, groups that use the mass media in order to gain access to political discourse to affect change. There are, of course, organizations such as corporations and other big business concerns that have special interests and yet try their best to stay out of the media spotlight. These groups need the media for less central purposes and generally participate more directly with decision-makers via sophisticated lobbying programs. Also, the focus here is limited to media/group interaction effects on special interest groups and does not include interaction effects on the media.

Special Interest Groups and the Mass Media

Special interest groups are "...organizations of people based on common interest -- often a single one -- devoted to

communicating their desires to public authorities, to attempting to influence legislation or bureaucratic action, and to reporting on activity of public officials pertinent to their issues."⁹ These groups are "initiating sources... persons or groups with the capacity to call public attention to the existence of an issue."¹⁰ Such access helps to determine the informal and formal political agenda and the way in which issues are defined. These groups form an important link of citizen participation in the political process. This participation is "an effort by one person or more to preserve or change the value-allocation, citizen participation is a form of political action,"¹¹ including direct participation (the explicit representation in shaping and implementing policies) and indirect participation (such as voting, petition drives, demonstrations and joining organizations).

But groups and the issues they promote can gain access to the public only if the mass media are willing to communicate them.¹² Two factors that are primary components for determining access are the ways mass media produce news and special interest group resources. Special interest groups do not gain access easily, "...the ability to be newsworthy itself requires resources and skills, many of which go hand in hand with economic power, at least, and are possessed by only a few."¹³

The news media's gatekeeping and agenda-setting functions can play important roles as barriers, or facilitators, in the political process. Political reality is shaped by various social processes,¹⁴ including the mass media process. They are our primary sources of information about public issues but they do not merely

mirror reality, "what the mass media choose to report significantly influences what individuals learn about and respond to."¹⁵ The mass media are powerful institutions in our social and political processes, but they are not "merely neutral 'message-carrying' networks." They are, rather, "themselves separate institutions with their own objectives to pursue, their own power and institutional dynamics."¹⁶

Power is the "relative ability to block or initiate public discussion of potential issues, to influence perceptions of public opinion held by key decision-makers once an issue 'goes public', to define issues and options under discussion, to influence participation by others and to induce decision-makers to adopt the desired policy."¹⁷ Groups or individuals (we could just as easily insert the mass media, as well) have power to the extent that they "consciously or unconsciously create or reinforce barriers to the public airing of policy conflicts."¹⁸

The mass media can, therefore, play an important role in how society changes or does not change.¹⁹ Influencing public opinion is central to affecting change in society and special interest groups use the mass media, in part, in order to promote this change. The use of symbols and the mass media are two key mechanisms by which groups can channel their demands to a wider constituency.²⁰ These groups, at least, are well aware that an "idea has little impact if not through the media."²¹

It is important to remember that although aggregate public opinion about policy is usually stable over time and does not seem to be affected generally by group efforts, changes in public²²

opinion that do occur are usually followed by congruent changes in policy.²³ And although research to date does not support public opinion change for most special interest groups (an important exception are information subsidies as defined by Gandy),²⁴ Page, et al have found that U.S. presidents, editorials, and experts do positively affect public opinion change through their media messages.²⁵

Even when groups are successful in their media efforts, the resulting coverage is not always what the group would like it to be. The media spotlight can distort certain aspects of an issue by focusing on the event rather than underlying concerns and by ignoring other aspects of issues that may be considered important to the group. Knowing how to deal with the news media can be a learning process of trial and error that requires excellent resources. The process can change groups and their goals.

Citizen Participation and the Mass Media:

Theoretical Models

Models that do at least implicitly include the mass media/special interest group interaction include Bachrach and Baratz' general theory of democracy, Meadow's political communication model, and the agenda-setting framework.

The flow of power in the general theory of democracy begins with conflicting groups, those persons and groups seeking a re-allocation of values and those persons and groups committed to existing values (see appendix A). These groups implement their sources of power (including resources, priorities, strategies and

interactions) in order to enter the channel of policy choices through the decision-making process. To get through the process, which can be initiated anywhere along the channel depending upon the sources of power, four serious barriers must be crossed. It is important to note the authors' description of the first barrier:

The channel of policy contains every demand for a policy change that receives public notice and engenders public discussion to the point that the demand becomes an issue that presses for resolutions in the decision-making arena. The first barrier consists of values, beliefs, and myths that the dominant portion of the community embraces. The barrier serves to suppress grievances reflecting values that conflict fundamentally with prevailing norms, and it rejects from serious public consideration those demands which are publicly articulated, but which again are radically at odds with the dominant view of what constitutes a political legitimate issue. If a demand is not within a scope of legitimacy...it will either receive no serious attention or will be used to discredit the person or organization that proposed it. (Emphasis mine)²²

Although Bachrach and Baratz do not specifically mention the mass media in their model, it does reaffirm the need for access to the media for those attempting to propose issues within a community. In order to overcome this barrier to access, special interest groups must modify their messages toward legitimacy. Of course other options, such as "deviant" events, also exist that can and do get the media's attention and these will be discussed later.

The model also includes the possibility for a demand for change that may succeed in generating support, and therefore

change, even though it was originally on the very margins of legitimacy. Success is dependent on resource skills, the exercise of power, and the gaining of authority by the group or movement.

Meadow attempts to bridge the gap between political science and communication studies with a model that places the news media in the most strategic location. Its power is central to the process of political communication (see appendix B); there can be no exchange between the government and the public on substantive issues without the mass media.¹

Citizens both withdraw information from the system and communicate (active participants) or do not communicate (inactives) through the system. "Participation can be viewed in terms of communication variables and as communication phenomenon,"^{2r} and, therefore, power is best explained as a result of information exchange.

Issues are initiated by citizens, participant/articulates and spectators/inarticulates, and their individual demands to groups and the mass media. The groups can directly communicate with the government in collective demands or through the media with amplified demands. Policy is then made, or not made, and the information is transmitted back to the groups and citizens. Demands are rarely articulated directly to the government but are usually aggregated and reduced by participation in groups. "Media-based" demand presentations are defined narrowly as that which "occurs through letters to the editor, human interest stories of problems with the bureaucracy, or advocacy type action line services."^{2'}

In an important and fundamental contrast to Bachrach and Baratz, Meadow assumes access to a diverse media that reflects reality perfectly. Part of the problem may be Meadow's use of Easton's limited input-output systems analysis as his model. Simply stated, the Meadow model is Groups --> Mass Media --> Government. Although Meadow contributes a needed focus on communication as political participation, several modifications are needed in order to make this a more complete model. For example, special interest groups may use the mass media to channel their demands to decision-makers through indirect means: a group may be trying to achieve greater support for its demands from the mass citizenry; raise funds, or; raise membership through the mass media all in an effort to eventually change policy or effect some other change.

The Agenda-Setting framework provides a useful bridge between political and communication models. Although agenda-setting is rarely invoked in this context, it can, in fact, be considered a communication model placed within a political framework because it describes mass communication as central to the political and social system. Research in the agenda-setting framework is a "more precise study of how the mass communication influence process actually operates."^{3c} Its primary focus has been the political campaign, the messages the media produce during a campaign that set the agenda for issues, and the determination of this agenda's effect on the formation of audience agendas.

But special interest groups can also be important in this model:

Beyond the specific behaviors of an election, it also is important to understand how competing groups in our society influence the shape of the political issues which concern all of us (and sometimes are critical in the outcome of a particular election). Every society must have processes by which the myriad problems, concerns, and questions of its many citizens are translated into succinct issues, are operationalized in government action of some sort, and perhaps finally are perpetuated as cultural values.

In a society as large as the United States, if a group does not have access to an interested mass medium -- either through the intrinsic appeal of its special interest or through the availability of extensive financial resources -- we simply will never learn of its concern. Or, as was the case with Vietnam and civil rights, concerned groups will have to take to the streets to convert their concern into an event that the news media will translate as an issue. Unfortunately, the news media are more attentive to news events than new ideas. So, the study of the agenda-setting process is crucial to our attempts to achieve a better interchange of ideas and a smoother process of social change within our society. (Emphasis mine)

It is also important to note that issues can be defined on a continuum between "obtrusive" and "unobtrusive" and that the strongest agenda-setting effects have been established for unobtrusive issues, those issues for which individuals depend upon the media. Special interest groups may have similar differential effects based on the issues with which they are concerned.

Constraints to Access:

The Mass News Media

Although radically dissenting opinions do gain access, most news generally fits within the established status quo. After all, the overriding purpose of the mass media is profit-making. This

purpose does not require a blackout of all dissenting opinions but rather an overwhelming bias throughout the media that is in favor of the prevailing social order, "there is nothing particularly surprising about the character and role of the mass media in advanced capitalist society. Given the economic and political context in which they function... they are intended to fulfill a conservative function; and do so."

Hall defines three key functions of the media: the selective construction of social knowledge; to reflect and reflect on "plurality" in order to provide a constant inventory of society's lexicons that help individuals not to know more but to make sense out of what is legitimate and what is not legitimate, and; the production of consensus and the construction of legitimacy -- "not so much the finished article itself, but the whole process of argument, exchange, debate, consultation and speculation by which it emerges."

The news media tend to exclude issues that seriously conflict with the status quo or issues that are extremely controversial and outside the mainstream of political discourse. Therefore, ideological conflicts are rarely presented unless they are considerably watered-down. One explanation attributes the paucity of such conflict to a weak political system (including the decline of the party press and the political parties themselves) resulting in a non-dialectical news media.

But ideological explanations are not sufficient. Newsmaking establishes its own image of society's order through a myriad of social, professional and practical pressures.

Television news stories focus on reporting facts by filtering most information through "the two sides" or "both sides."³⁵ Organizational and economic imperatives necessitate stories that can maintain large audiences. Newsmakers believe that images should be easily recognizable and, therefore, emphasize that which fits best into a narrative plot line.³⁶ The resulting coverage tends to focus on the event rather than the issues and conditions involved, the person rather than the group, conflict rather than consensus, and the facts that advance the story line rather than those that explain the situation.³⁷

The news frame reduces complex issues so that "change always seems relatively easy to accomplish, since the more complex reasons for tempering change -- such as economic feasibility, minority interests and possible consequences in other areas -- are neglected by a purely visual presentation."³⁸

There are also purely practical constraints on who gets to make news. Powerful sources, for example leading public officials, are most depended upon because they are quickly available, reliable, productive, articulate able to supply suitable information, and are authoritative.³⁹ They are also efficient -- another essential component of deciding what is news, "...the choice of efficient methods pervade story selection and production."⁴⁰ Also important to source selection is the concept of journalistic balance in story mixture, subjects, and geographic, demographic and political variety. And so for the most part, news reports on those at the top of the social hierarchy and those at the bottom who may threaten the prevailing power structure.⁴¹

Special Interest Groups, Social Movements and Mass Media Strategies

Goldenberg, in her study of resource poor groups, found that leaders of such groups decide to seek access depending on the properties of the group, the target, and the situation. The greater the resources, the greater is the interest group's ability to gain access. Groups are not constantly seeking access to the press but are most likely to do so when the group assumes some high priority goal or goals. These goals include: establishing the group's identity; projecting certain group images; conveying information; identifying the group's enemies and targets publicly; building credibility; building group resources such as visibility, outside funds, moral superiority and personal reputation.

Group leaders are most likely to seek access under the following conditions: when the goals are widely shared by the group membership; when the group possesses key resources such as experience, self-esteem, efficacy, money and other resources such as size, knowledge and cohesion; when the leaders are willing to exploit these resources in order to gain access.

Group leaders seek access under the following conditions: when they are trying to reach a large, distant and geographically dispersed target; targets responsible to a much larger community than the group itself; elected officials; the newspaper's readers.

The press' attention was gained when the following conditions were present: the group's goal deviated from the social norm; the goal affected many people; the goal was a variation on an object

of a current press theme; the goal was specific but not technical.

Tichenor, Donohue and Olien conducted a well-documented study of nineteen small communities selected on the basis of the existence of controversial issues that would receive high media coverage. The press "is an integral subsystem within the total system, and its strong linkages with other system components impinge upon it as much as it impinges upon them, if not more."⁴⁵ Organizations "appear to become more conservative in their tactics as they widen their organizational base..."⁴⁶

Among other purposes, small community groups use the press as a device for defining the problem and creating an awareness about it for the community at large in order to reach decision-makers. But the press cannot escape its important role in this process of political communication, and the press' performance "typically becomes part of the controversy."

The media tend to reflect "the perspectives of organizational power centers," specifically business and other dominant power groups, and they tend to back the winner during any given conflict situation. "The entire struggle reflects the limited power of citizen groups that oppose established forces and procedures. Within the local community, it is the power elite that ultimately shapes the media outlook and which therefore receives reciprocal reinforcement from those media"⁴⁷ (emphasis mine). Tichenor, et. al., tentatively hypothesize that interest groups go through stages of experimenting on media strategies depending on their resources and their learned experiences of what does and does not work in order to gain access to policy making.

Gitlin defines the news media as a potential "weapon of the disenfranchised...(b)ut as soon as movements discover media power, they -- like presidential candidates -- try to perform as they think journalistic conventions dictate they must. By following these conventions, however, grass-roots movements have often undermined themselves and compromised the power to determine their own destinies, their leadership, and even their politics." The closer "the concerns and values of social movements coincide with the concerns and values of elites in politics and in media, the more likely they are to become incorporated in the prevailing news frames."

Political movements use the mass media in order to matter (an essential political communication process):

...(B)ut in the process they become 'newsworthy' only by submitting to the implicit rules of newsmaking, but conforming to journalistic notions (themselves embedded in history) of what a 'story' is, what an 'event' is, what a 'protest' is. The processed image then tends to become 'the movement' for wider publics and institutions who have few alternative sources of information, or none at all, about it; that image has its impact on public policy, and when the movement is being opposed, what is being opposed is in large part a set of mass-mediated images.

The mass media have the power to black out certain events and the power to define those aspects of events through their own frames of what is "significant" and these images "become implicated in a movement's self-image."

The media affected the Students for a Democratic Society (the group Gitlin uses for his analysis) in the following ways: it

generated a membership surge and therefore strain on the rank and file membership (new members were attracted by the image portrayed and not the real underlying ideology of the SDS); certified leaders and transformed them into celebrity figures which alienated them from the rank and file membership; inflated rhetoric and militancy (the more outrageous the act, the more the coverage provided); elevated a moderate alternative (the one deemed acceptable and given the most legitimatizing coverage); contracted the movement's experience of time and helped to encapsulate it, and finally; the media tended to both amplify and contain the movement's images all at the same time.

In Tuchman's analysis, social movements pass through distinct phases "progressing from informal groups or networks to complex voluntary organizations able to lobby corporations, unions, and legislative bodies."⁵¹ As a social movement evolves, coverage of the movement is expected to change "inasmuch as news organizations coordinate their news nets with legitimated institutions."⁵² In other words, coverage changes as the movement itself changes into a more formal and legitimate organization. What is missing in this formulation is the role that the media may play in the very evolution of these groups (however, Tuchman does describe what happened to the women's movement when leadership was imposed on it by the media's need for spokespersons).

A discrepancy exists between the approaches of newswriters and participants of a movement, "the activities and temporal orientations of newswork and those of social movements are antithetical. Necessarily, then, just as newswork transforms

occurrences into news events, so, too, it must transform the thrust of issues (as defined by proponents of a social movement) as it shapes them into news stories.⁵³

Since events (centered around male concerns), and not issues, are the major focus of the news media, much of the movement's early political emphasis was left uncovered (for example, consciousness raising). And the traditional news techniques that were used, such as "firsts" and the "reaction story," tended to depict the movement as reformist in nature.

The women's movement found itself limited in its ability to carry forth radical issues once it was successfully institutionalized. The women's movement, as was the case for SDS, was co-opted by the frames of the conventional news narrative, "once framed within the web of facticity, a social movement cannot undercut the news net by challenging the legitimacy of established institutions."⁵⁴

Morris correctly predicted, way back in 1970, that media treatment of the feminist movement would lead to "co-optation through respectability,"⁵⁵ resulting in only slight and slow changes in the status of women. A more recent study found her prediction to be accurate: those feminist issues perceived as more revolutionary, radical and non-legitimate (the goals of the early members of NOW) received little positive news media coverage.⁵⁶ The sweeping changes initially proposed by the movement have not come about. Instead, women continue to be responsible for maintaining the home and caring for children as well as holding down jobs for which they are still consistently paid less than men. In fact,

those at the forefront of the women's movement itself no longer focus on these changes as issues of concern. The present focus of the movement is on mainstream politics and media coverage of these efforts is more accurate and positive.

A Model for Special Interest Group Interaction with the Mass News Media

As the review of the literature demonstrates, we do not have a complete model within a political framework of what takes place when special interest groups and the mass media interact. There is, however, consensus on the media's powerful role in political communication among communication researchers. This by no means indicates that media interaction is the only social process taking place that leads to group changes or that it is even the most important interaction.

We have seen that media access is more successful for groups with certain specific goals and certain resources. Although little effect on public opinion has been found for groups that do, indeed, gain access to the news media, most special interest groups continue in their media activities. Do resource rich groups for the most part circumvent the mass media in favor of direct participation through lobbying, campaigns and other non-media centric activities? Is the attempt to achieve specific goals through the mass media an inappropriate myth (that is, the pluralist ideal itself), perpetuated by those in power, in which groups indulge? Have some goals that may be successfully attained

through media access simply not been measured (i.e., fundraising)?

Is Moscovici correct in his finding that minority opinions have an effect on subconscious opinions and have been, therefore, left unmeasured altogether?⁵⁷ At least to some extent, research shows that the answer to each of these questions is most likely a qualified yes.

The proposed model (see figure 2) that follows is based on what is already known about special interest group interaction with the mass news media as reviewed in the literature above and research questions and hypotheses that need to be tested and is not meant to be a complete map of this complex process. The focus here is on those groups that use the mass media in order to participate in the political discourse.

The five major special interest group components (see figure 1) and the variables connected with each component are synthesized largely from the various studies already discussed. The first component is the realistic or unrealistic nature of the goal and whether or not it falls within the political mainstream. Goals can range from those that are immediate, such as the raising of funds, to long range changes in the social structure. The second factor is the level of resources available to the group including funds, staff, membership, experience, age of group, knowledge of media routines, and contact with the media. The news media's perception of issue legitimacy makes up the fourth component. Variables at work in this component include the issue's level of controversy, complexity, its recognition as an already defined issue, and whether or not the issue is mainstream. Whether or not

the activity itself fits into the mainstream and how the news media perceives the activity's legitimacy make up the fifth factor. Variables include time, place, type of activity and its news suitability. The last component involves the spokesperson's fit with news values and his/her legitimacy. Decision points for this factor include whether or not the spokesperson is articulate, well-known, expert, powerful, productive, authoritative, reliable, agreeable, able to supply suitable information, and is knowledgeable of news media routines.

A high level of expectation for the success of goals is assumed for all special groups attempting media access. It is also necessary to formulate goals that are realistic in order to judge whether or not goals are achieved or not achieved through media access. Therefore, goals can be either well-defined with realistic expectations or unrealistic expectations or not well-defined with realistic expectations or unrealistic expectations. The model would predict most success for those groups with well-defined goals set within realistic expectations although success can also be possible through other combinations (e.g. the group plans and executes activities that gain access that do not achieve specific goals).

For the purposes of this model, success is measured by accurate coverage, that is coverage that accurately reflects the group's goals and issues (as defined by the group itself). This requirement is again connected to the group's formulation of realistic goals. For example, if a group plans a demonstration in order to influence public opinion and expects the news media to

cover the issues involved more than the event itself, it is an unrealistic goal that will result in inaccurate coverage. On the other hand, if a group plans a demonstration in order to indirectly influence or pressure decision makers and understands that the event itself will be the news focus, it is a realistic goal that will result in accurate coverage.

The resources of the group are important variables here. Those groups with a more sophisticated understanding of the news media and political processes have the best chances for successful access. These are the groups that will formulate issues that can be perceived legitimately, plan activities that fall within the news net, and be represented by resourceful spokespersons. But the model also predicts that these groups are also most likely to be legitimate organizations with mainstream goals and issues.

Barriers to achieving successful access can be met at any component. For example, it is quite possible for a group to plan and execute a legitimate activity that falls within the news net but is built around an issue that is not perceived as legitimate. Or an event may fall within the news net built around an issue that is perceived as legitimate, but the group itself is perceived as non-legitimate. Such conditions could lead to no access or to access with inaccurate coverage. Again, inaccurate coverage results when group goals for access are not met. This result can also include coverage that is misleading or purposively frivolous.

Groups base their media activities, in part, on the success of their interactions with the news media. Groups may choose to "court" the media by executing the same activity again or by

attempting a new activity. Groups may also choose to "spurn" the media. This decision is most likely for those groups that do not want to change their structure, goals and issues and probably is decided after several cycles through the model. Groups that cycle through the model with successful results on subsequent tries probably tend toward participation in more legitimately perceived activities. This change goes hand in hand with possible changes in membership, group structure, and goals. Most important, the group may also tend to move toward the mainstream of legitimate issues.

Conclusion

In order to gain successful access, special interest groups need to learn to play by the rules of the game and this process may change groups in ways that are just beginning to be understood. The process of interaction between groups and the news media may lead to the diluting of group purposes and goals. If this model does indeed accurately portray this specific interaction process, the assumptions of political participation in the pluralist model that tend to underlie much of communication research may be found inadequate.

One possible model for parts of this interaction process has been proposed here. It needs to be tested, modified and linked with other components in order to achieve a more complete understanding of the process. Possible research areas include: interaction variables such as attitude change at the individual level and interactions such as decision-making and feedback to

groups and/or the mass media at the political level; how media images of groups affect journalists, decision-makers and public opinion (Shoemaker has addressed some of these issues in her work on special interest groups⁵⁶); interaction effects on the mass media -- how quickly, if at all, do the media respond to, incorporate, and as argued here, co-opt the issues or demands introduced by groups; how the mass media themselves change through interaction with groups and public opinion, and; mass media interactions with those groups whose goals include purposively dodging the media spotlight.

Research on special interest groups and their participation in political processes is being rejuvenated by political scientists after a twenty year lull during which research focused on individual effects and public opinion level changes. But this new attention on groups, as was the case for the previous studies, does not include the mass media as explicit and central components. Unfortunately, special interest groups have rarely been the focus of mass communication researchers (the few studies cited on groups comes primarily from sociologists). That leaves a lot of work to be done.

For example, we do not really have a good or complete map of which special interest groups do gain access and under which conditions for which issues, let alone how groups tend to be covered when access is achieved. Also needed is a generalized map of the voices, such as government officials and experts, that do gain regular access to the media. Some of this work has begun with a reanalysis of the Page data on mass media sources and

public opinion. This analysis work needs to be started in order to lend support for the parts of the process developed here.

Once the established findings on mass communication effects are rounded-out with a better description of just what the mass media agenda is and how it is formed, it becomes much easier to test the pluralist assumptions implied by most mass communication research. Paraphrasing Blumler, do the mass news media facilitate or block democratic values?⁶⁴ And moving beyond these pluralist assumptions, are the mass media facilitators of social change, or are the mass media agents of social control?

For example, Agenda-Setting can be a particularly helpful model for describing the mass media agenda and how it is formed and tied to public agendas. Once the Agenda-Setting model is mapped out more generally (that is, when it is broadened to include processes such as the model proposed here), the mass media will be in a better position for placement in one of the three prevailing political paradigms. Since mass communication is central to political participation, it should be central to at least the pluralist model. But if only certain voices are being heard on a regular basis, for whatever reasons, then perhaps the pluralist model is inappropriate as a description of the political structure as it has evolved in the United States. If the mass media are found to contain primarily the voices of elites, the elite paradigm might be a better model of the sociopolitical structure and the mass media's role in it (elite theory predicts that democratic practices are possible only in stable post industrial societies with unified and consensual elites) Or is

the social control of class analysis operating?

Identifying and understanding mass media variables in relationship to political participation is essential in a world where the mass media are becoming increasingly important institutions and social and political change seems to becoming increasingly difficult to accomplish.

Figure 1

COMPONENTS OF SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP/NEWS MEDIA INTERACTION

(1) High expectation for success of goals assumed

(2) GOAL(S)

- a) realistic goal
unrealistic goal
- b) mainstream
not mainstream

variables: create forum for issue
 disseminate information on issue
 change social structure
 gain support for issue
 influence public opinion
 influence decision makers
 influence group members
 increase membership
 raise funds
 create support for group

(3) RESOURCES

- a) high level of resources available
high level of intrinsic newsworthiness
low level of resources available

variables: funds
 staff
 membership
 experience
 age of group
 knowledge of media routines
 contacts with media

(4) ISSUE

- a) news media perceives as legitimate
news media perceives as non-legitimate

variables: not controversial
 not complex
 mainstream
 already an issue
 controversial
 complex

(5) ACTIVITY

- a) fits into newsframe
does not fit into newsframe
- b) news media perceives as legitimate
news media perceives as non-legitimate

variables: time
 place
 type of activity
 mainstream
 deviant
 suitability
 impact on nation and national interests
 impact on large number of people
 significance on past and/or future events
 and issues
 importance in relation to other institutions
 and government

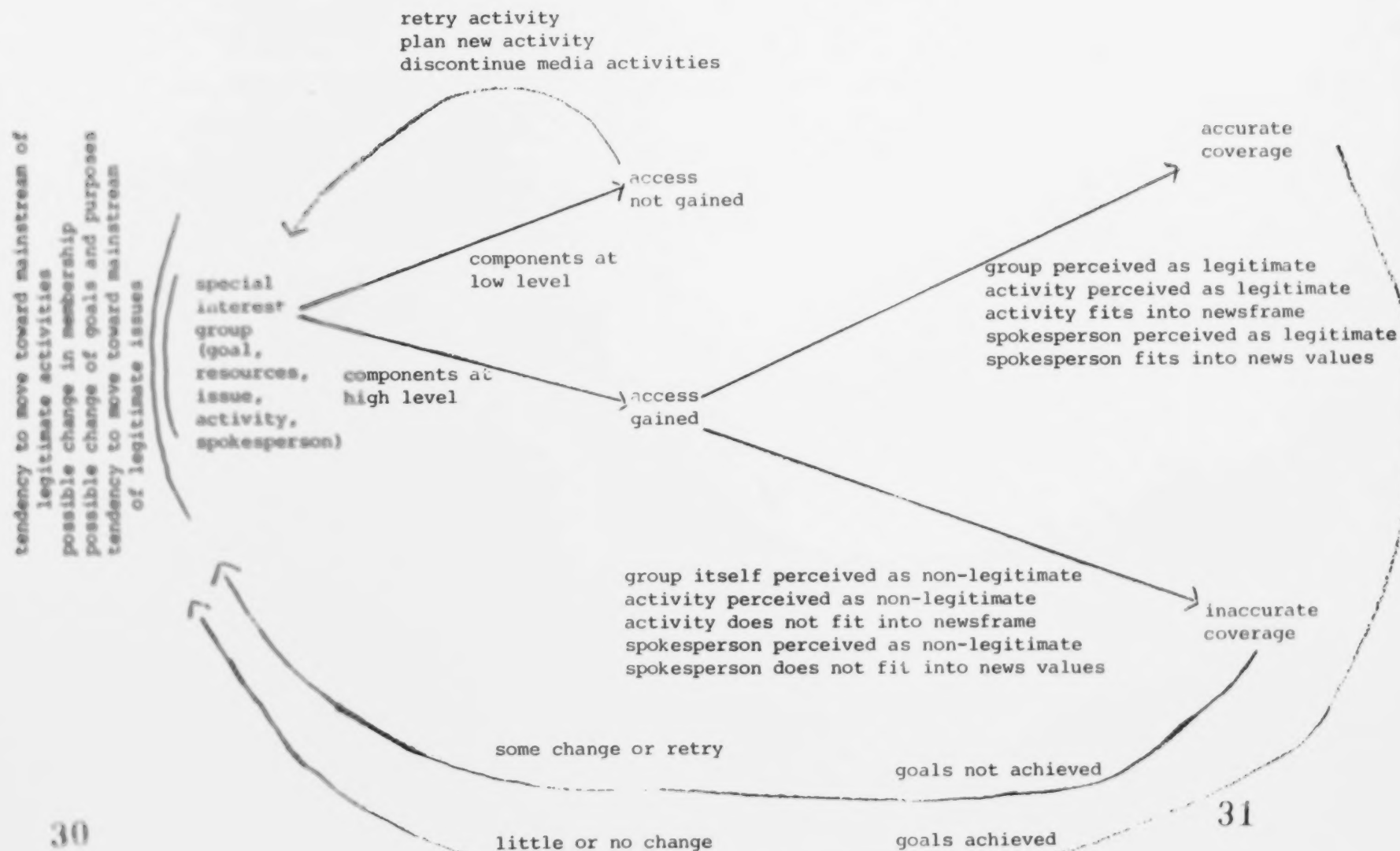
(6) SPOKESPERSON

- a) fits into news values
does not fit into news values
- b) news media perceives as legitimate
news media perceives as non-legitimate

variables: articulate
 well-known
 expert
 powerful
 productive
 authoritative
 reliable
 agreeable
 supplies suitable information
 knowledge of media routines

Figure 2

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP/MASS MEDIA INTERACTION PROCESS: EFFECTS ON GROUPS



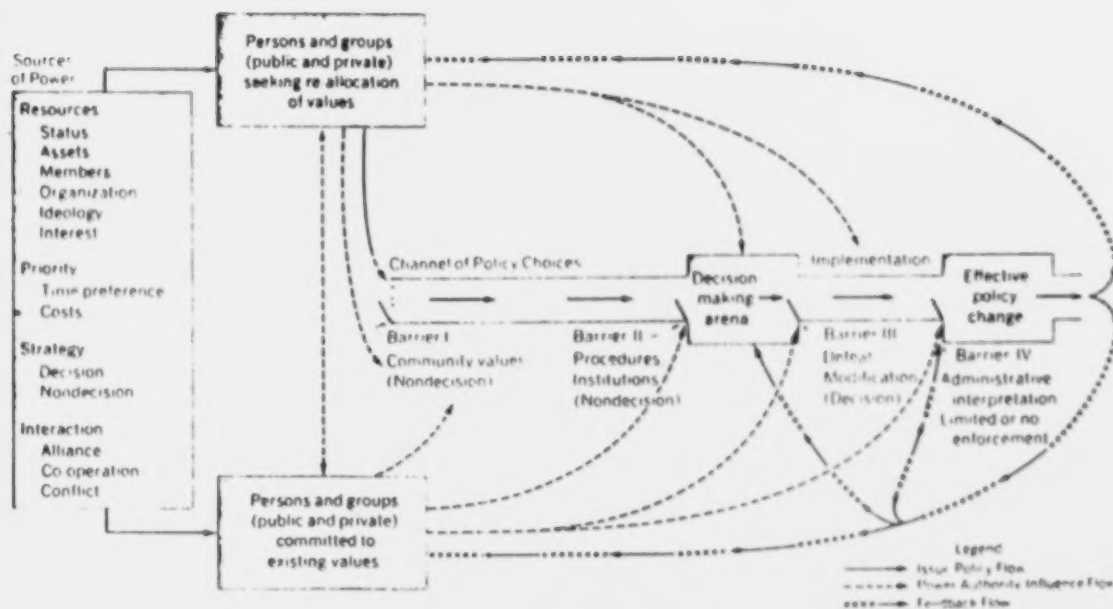
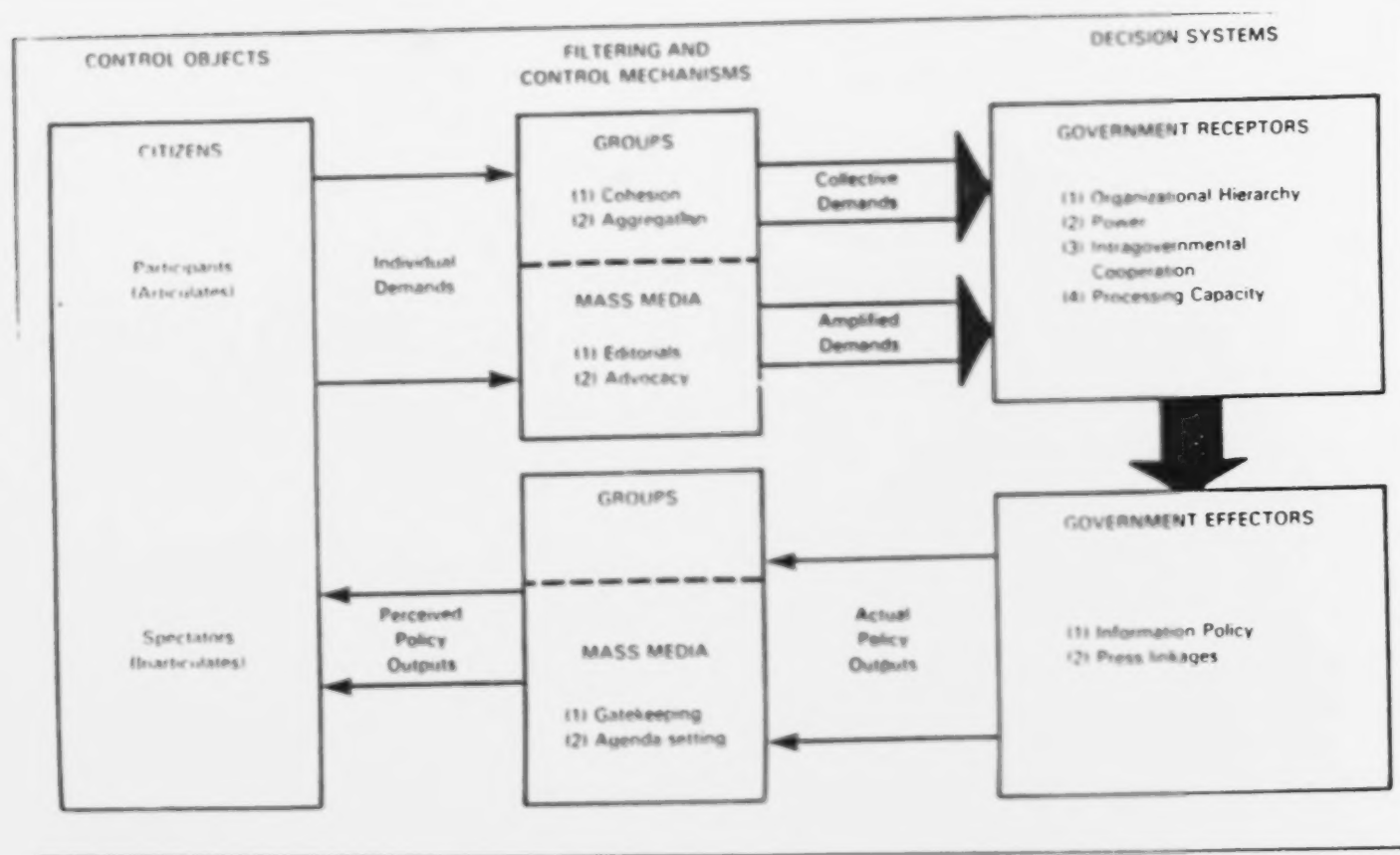


Figure 2. The Political System: Flow of Anti-poverty Power

(Bachrach and Baratz)



Political Communication Model
(Meadow)

FOOTNOTES

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